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DCHA/FFP FOR LANDIS, BRAUSE, SKORIC AND PETERSEN,  
AFR/SA FOR POE AND COPSON, AFR/SD FOR ISALROW AND WHELAN  
PRETORIA FOR FFP DISKIN AND OFDA BRYAN  
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REDSO/ESA/FFP FOR SENYKORR  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [FAID](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT IN FOOD SECURITY

REF: HARARE 423

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SUMMARY  
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[¶11.](#) A monthly food monitoring report issued by the National NGO Food Security Network (FOSENET) suggests a slight improvement in the food security situation across the country since January due to wider distribution of relief food and early harvests. Despite these gains in rural areas, the urban areas experienced a deterioration in food availability because of the absence of urban feeding programs and the scarcity and politicized distribution of Grain Marketing Board (GMB) grain. Political bias in GMB grain distribution was a problem for roughly half the reporting districts but was not a barrier to receiving relief food. Information from the partially functioning UN Relief Information and Verification Office and an embassy database on incidents of politicized food distributions suggests that most food manipulations are of GMB food. Urban areas and Matabeleland were areas most affected by these biased food distributions.  
END SUMMARY.

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SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT IN FOOD SITUATION  
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[¶12.](#) A monthly food monitoring report issued by the National NGO Food Security Network (FOSENET) suggests a slight improvement in the food security situation in half the rural districts due to early harvest yields and successful WFP and C-SAFE food aid distributions. Urban areas have deteriorating food security situations. Exclusion from beneficiary lists, transportation problems, policy gaps on food supply for urban areas, and civil servants who cannot get GMB food were the main obstacles to food access.

[¶13.](#) FOSENET is a network of 24 Zimbabwean NGOs, organized in March 2002 to monitor food needs, availability, and access through NGOs based within districts and through community based monitors. This is FOSENET's sixth report and covers February and March 2003. It is based upon 132 and 147 reports from 53 and 58 districts for February and March, respectively. The number of districts is more than in December/January.

[¶14.](#) Conclusions from the report are as follows:

--By March, 31 districts, or 53 percent of responding districts, reported an improved situation compared to more than 60 percent of reporting districts reporting a deteriorating food security situation in November, December, and January.

--Vulnerability stayed about the same with 49 percent of districts reporting everyone in need of food. In January it was 47 percent.

--GMB deliveries continued to be erratic but the average volume of deliveries per ward increased to 7.3 tons up from 1.8 tons in January. Matabeleland and Mashonaland East had increased deliveries. Hurungwe in Mashonaland West continued to report wards that have received no GMB food since October. Umgusa in Matabeleland North received no food since January, while Gwanda in Matabeleland South and Chikomba in Mashonaland East received none since November 2002.

-- Half the districts reported political bias in favor of ZANU-PF party members in GMB grain access. The cost of GMB sales was still a barrier to access with the upper price range for a 10-kg bag of corn meal being Z\$300, 158 percent

above the controlled price.

--Commercially supplied food was still scarce and expensive. In 16 districts, workers for commercial suppliers, people with political access, uniformed forces, youth (Green Bombers), and people with business ties were granted access to limited market supplies.

-- The informal market prices reached Z\$8000 for a 10-kg bag of corn meal in some areas of the Midlands--almost 70 times the controlled price. The profit margin for GMB corn sold on the informal market widened to Z\$4200 from Z\$2800 in January.

--Relief supplies improved in Mashonaland East and West and in some parts of Manicaland but the eight urban districts received no relief supplies. In two districts, Mhondoro in Mashonaland West and Goromonzi in Mashonaland East, NGO partners reportedly stopped food distributions because of political interference.

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UN FOOD MONITORING AT STANDSTILL  
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15. The UN Relief and Recovery Unit's (RRU), Relief and Information Verification Office (RIVO) has made little progress since it opened the Mutare monitoring site in eastern Zimbabwe in February. Of the six UN volunteer field monitors (UNV) George Olesh, head of RIVO, hopes to hire, three are in Zimbabwe. The other three have not been hired because of a glitch within the UNDP system whereby the office in Brussels has not wired the money to the account in New York. The UNV main hiring office in Bonn, Germany will not process further hiring requests until this money appears in their New York account. (See Reftel). In addition to staffing shortfalls, RIVO is still waiting for GOZ support and concurrence for the office's activities.

16. Olesh told PolOff that the ECHO representative in Zimbabwe asked when RIVO would begin validation and complained that the office was moving too slowly. Olesh told PolOff that the partners will most likely need to reconvene to redefine their expectations from RIVO. (COMMENT. Admittedly, the RIVO has been slow in setting up operations but it is not unexpected. The UN agencies cannot proceed without government concurrence, as other NGOs, with short-term interests, may be able to do. The UN agencies, in particular UNDP, have long-term interests at stake and a favorable relationship with the GOZ is necessary for long-term program success. END COMMENT.)

17. Olesh told PolOff that during the March 17 GOZ/Donor meeting, the Swedish Ambassador asked Ministry of Social Welfare representatives if there would be a RIVO. The government officials replied that they would not support district level verification units as described in the proposal. Their preference is to have a centrally located office and then deploy teams comprised of NGO and GOZ representatives. Olesh told us that such an arrangement would defeat the purpose of the RIVO because the process would be political and the reports would be edited down to nothing.

18. In spite of these setbacks, Olesh is still relatively optimistic that he will be able to open another office within the next few months. He identified Gwanda in Matabeleland South, which was declared a disaster area in March, as an option. He said since Matabeleland South has no active governor, the provincial administrator must get a consensus of all district administrators before RIVO activities can proceed. If the administrators make no decision by May 5, Olesh said RIVO would try to open an office in Gweru, where the governor is willing to host and support the effort. Olesh also identified Muzarabani and Marondera in Mashonaland Central as possible locations, banking on lingering district and provincial level goodwill in response to UN relief efforts during the Muzarabani floods in February.

19. Olesh told us that most of the complaints UNDP receives about food distributions have to do with beneficiary registrations and rates of expansions and have nothing to do with politicization of food distributions. Most of the complaints about politicized food come from Harare and Bulawayo and involve access to GMB food.

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LITTLE POLITICAL BIAS IN NGO FOOD ACCESS  
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110. PolOff has been keeping a database of incidents of food distribution along political lines since October 2002. Database entries are anecdotal reports by US Embassy employees and friends of Embassy employees, press reports, and individual NGO reports. The results of the database suggest little in the way of political interference in international relief food distributions but a fair amount of

interference in GMB food distributions. Most reports of political interference came from Matabeleland.

¶11. In its most recent report, FOSENET reported sites in the following districts as having difficulty with food access due to political bias in food distribution: Lupane and Bubi in Matabeleland North; Chimanimani and Mutare rural in Manicaland; and Chinhoyi urban in Mashonaland West.

¶12. On April 1, the World Food Program issued a report of suspensions and delays of WFP food distributions in 2003. In half of the investigated incidents, which include the Insiza incident reported in reftel, WFP suspected a political motive. Only in Insiza are food distributions still suspended. The NGOs involved in these isolated incidents are ORAP in Insiza, World Vision in Murehwa and Wedza, and Christian Care in Buhera.

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COMMENT  
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¶13. The utility of the RIVO is waning fast. The Ministry of Social Welfare's refusal to cooperate or endorse the effort at the GOZ/donor meeting essentially eliminates any hopes the donor community may have had to monitor GMB food. Since there are few allegations of politicized food distributions among relief agencies, the RIVO will have limited usefulness.

Fortunately, food access has steadily improved since the beginning of the year and fewer rural districts have to contend with the biases of the GMB. END COMMENT.

SULLIVAN